

used in the classification process, and can be customized to suit the needs of individuals.

The technique has low overhead, and is able to quickly and accurately determine non-spam messages.

Although the foregoing invention has been described in some detail for purposes  
5 of clarity of understanding, it will be apparent that certain changes and modifications may  
be practiced within the scope of the appended claims. It should be noted that there are  
many alternative ways of implementing both the process and apparatus of the present  
invention. Accordingly, the present embodiments are to be considered as illustrative and  
not restrictive, and the invention is not to be limited to the details given herein, but may  
10 be modified within the scope and equivalents of the appended claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

## **CLAIMS**

1. A method for classifying a message comprising:
  - receiving the message;
  - identifying all items of a certain type in the message;
  - determining whether each of the items meets a criterion;
  - and in the event that all the items are determined to meet the criterion, determining a classification of the message.
2. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1 wherein determining whether each of the items meets the criterion includes determining whether each of the items is acceptable.
3. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1 wherein the items include a distinguishing property.
4. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1 wherein the items include a contact point.
- 15 5. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1 wherein the items include a contact point that is a universal resource locator (URL).
6. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1 wherein the items includes a contact point that is a phone number.
7. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1 wherein the items 20 includes a contact point that is an address.
8. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1 wherein determining a classification of the message includes classifying the message as a non-spam message.
9. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1 wherein determining whether each of the items meets the criterion includes determining whether the item 25 exists in a database of acceptable items.
10. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1, wherein determining whether each of the items meets the criterion includes reducing the item to its canonical equivalent and computing a signature based on the canonical equivalent.

11. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1, wherein determining whether each of the items meets the criterion includes deriving a signature from the item, and determining whether the signature exists in a database of acceptable signatures.
12. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1, in the event that the  
5 signature is determined not meet the criterion, further comprising processing the message to determine its classification.
13. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1, wherein:
  - determining whether each of items meets the criterion includes
  - determining whether the item exists in a database of acceptable items;
  - 10 and the database is updated by a registration process.
14. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 13, wherein the registration process includes:
  - receiving a registration message;
  - determining whether the registration message is from an acceptable source; and
  - 15 in the event that the registration message is from an acceptable source,
    - extracting an item from the message; and
    - adding an entry derived from the item to the database.
- 20 15. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 13, wherein determining whether the message is from an acceptable source includes checking a certificate associated with the message.
16. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 13, wherein the database is further maintained by performing a test to determine whether the message is spam.
- 25 17. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1, wherein:
  - determining whether each of items meets the criterion includes
  - determining whether the item exists in a database of acceptable items;
  - and the database is updated by aggregating user inputs.
18. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 17, wherein aggregating  
30 user inputs includes:

extracting an item from a user classified messages;  
updating the state of the item based on user classification.

19. A method for classifying a message as recited in Claim 1 wherein:  
determining whether each of the items meets a classification criterion  
5 includes determining whether the item exists in a database of acceptable items;  
and the database is updated by post-processing stored messages.

20. A system for classifying a message comprising:  
an interface configured to receive the message;  
a processor coupled to the interface, configured to:  
10 identify all items of a certain type in the message;  
determine whether each of the items meets a criterion;  
and in the event that all the items are determined to meet the  
criterion,  
determine a classification of the message.

15 21. A computer program product for classifying a message, the computer program  
product being embodied in a computer readable medium and comprising computer  
instructions for:  
receiving the message;  
identifying all items of a certain type in the message;  
20 determining whether each of the items meets a criterion;  
and in the event that all the items are determined to meet the criterion,  
determining a classification of the message.